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Chairman: Mr. Busacca ..... (Italy)

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The *meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

Agenda item 105: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/52/3, A/52/38/Rev.1, A/52/116-S/1997/317, A/52/300, 326, 337, 352, 355, 356, 408, A/52/447-S/1997/775 and A/52/460)

Agenda item 106: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) (A/52/113-E/1997/18, A/52/281, A/52/447-S/1997/775 and A/52/460)

1. **Ms. Khan** (Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)) said that CEDAW continued to be encouraged by the steady increase in the number of States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. These were now 161 States parties to the Convention and a number of them had withdrawn or were considering withdrawing reservations, in response to General Assembly resolution 51/68. As of 1 October 1997, 15 States parties had accepted the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention, which limited the Committee's meeting time. She appealed to the other States parties to accept the amendment so that the two-thirds majority required for it to enter into force would be achieved. In 1997, CEDAW had been able to meet for two three-week sessions, each preceded by a one-week pre-session working group meeting.

2. During those two sessions, the Committee had reviewed 17 reports from States parties, thereby significantly reducing the backlog of reports awaiting consideration. CEDAW had discussed improved methods of considering States parties' reports and had revised the way in which it formulated concluding comments in order to give States parties a clear indication of their strengths in implementing the Convention and of areas where further effort was required.

3. The Committee had also adopted a general recommendation on articles 7 and 8 of the Convention, emphasizing the importance of equality of opportunity and participation in public life and decision-making, and had continued to strengthen its links with specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies. In addition, CEDAW had taken steps to develop its relationship with non-governmental organizations, since information from them could shed light on the de facto implementation of the Convention and help focus on areas that required improvement. It had also been recommended that States parties should consult national and non-governmental organizations in preparing their reports.

4. In 1998, CEDAW would review eight reports at each of its sessions and would prepare a general recommendation concerning article 12, on women and health. The Committee would also commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by preparing a written statement on reservations, particularly in the context of article 2 of the Convention. Steps should be taken to ensure that the Committee's work received full recognition and support. In that regard, CEDAW had been encouraged by the progress made in the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention allowing for individual petitions.

5. The Committee's work had contributed substantially to the eradication of discrimination against women. Its work in the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action had underlined the complementary nature of the Convention and the Platform, which were powerful tools for achieving gender equality. Lastly, she stressed that the human rights treaty monitoring bodies, particularly the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, should, when considering reports by States parties, give particular attention to ensuring the full enjoyment by adolescent girls of their rights.

6. **Ms. Setyowati** (Indonesia) said that her delegation was encouraged by the progress made over the past year in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and welcomed the efforts being made to ensure greater clarity with regard to gender sensitive programming. In that connection, the General Assembly should draw attention to the need for a gender perspective in development programmes and in addressing macroeconomic questions. Furthermore, since the Economic and Social Council was providing for an integrated follow-up to the various international conferences on economic and social development, the conclusions agreed upon should be reflected in that process.

7. The United Nations should serve as an example for promoting gender equality and the advancement of women in decision-making. Her delegation therefore agreed with the recommendation in paragraph 74 of document A/52/281 that the General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women should be regularly provided with statistics on the number and percentage of women at all levels throughout the United Nations system. Indonesia looked forward to the consideration in 1998 of national action plans by the Commission, which should contribute to the comprehensive review and appraisal of efforts to carry out the Platform for Action in 1999. Her country was aware of the limitations

faced by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and believed that the suggestion to make funds available from the Centre for Human Rights for technical and advisory services should be given further consideration.

8. Indonesia welcomed the work being carried out on the issue of indicators as a basis for addressing the situation of women migrant workers, and stressed the need to achieve a consensus in that regard. Such indicators should also be used as a general guide in formulating national policy on overseas employment. In that connection, she was pleased to inform the Committee that Indonesia had decided to become a party to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

9. Indonesia continued to mainstream a gender perspective into its national development. Major government institutions were working to increase gender awareness at both national and local levels. The national development plan included measures to enhance the capabilities of women in promoting development, increase protection of women workers, strengthen their ability to enhance family welfare and develop a socio-cultural environment that would help to achieve the goals of women in development.

10. **Mrs. Nicodemos** (Brazil) said that her delegation associated itself with the statements made at a previous meeting on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and on behalf of the Rio Group. Brazil believed that the United Nations played a crucial role in integrating women into political, social and economic life and commended the work of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women.

11. Brazil had a long-standing tradition of supporting international instruments and declarations aimed at promoting women's rights, and its Constitution had incorporated many of the principles set forth in those documents. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had been the source of inspiration for many recent achievements. In 1997, Brazil had adopted its national plan of action, which contained a set of policies and measures in priority areas to be implemented by the Government with the cooperation of non-governmental bodies. Women's participation in political life was a key factor in achieving gender equality. Legislation recently adopted by the Brazilian Congress established that a minimum of 30 per cent of all candidates for elected office should be women. That was a far-reaching initiative, which would increase women's participation in all spheres of life. Since the Beijing Conference, several policies and programmes were being implemented in such fields as poverty eradication, the prevention and elimination of violence against women, education and training, health care and productive rights, and women and the media, which were all critical areas identified in the Platform for Action.

12. **Mrs. Ben Yedder** (Tunisia) underscored the decisive role played by the Organization in furthering the advancement of women and supported the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system. In that connection, she stressed the need for strict respect for the principle of equitable geographical distribution in the employment of women in the United Nations system in order to enable women from developing countries to contribute to the Organization's work.

13. She welcomed the measures to implement the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women as set forth in the Secretary-General's report (A/52/281) and the steps taken by the United Nations bodies active in promoting the advancement of women. Tunisia would spare no effort in supporting their work and implementing the recommendations of the Beijing Conference. In that connection, she stressed the need to ensure the implementation of General Assembly resolution 51/69, which reaffirmed the need to mobilize resources to enable developing countries to implement the Platform for Action.

14. Tunisia had always accorded particular importance to the participation of women in development. Accordingly, the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was one of the primary objectives of its economic and social development programmes.

15. Tunisia's efforts to promote the advancement of women dated back to independence and the promulgation of a new code on marital status which abolished polygamy and forced marriages, and instituted civil divorce. In 1992, that legislation had been substantially amended, replacing the wife's duty of obedience to her husband with the concept of mutual respect, consolidating the custody rights of mothers, and establishing maintenance allowances for divorced women and their children. The labour code had been reformed simultaneously, enshrining the principle of non-discrimination between men and women in the workplace.

16. Tunisia was striving through its education system to prepare young people for life in a society free from gender discrimination. Measures to reduce the school drop-out rate

among young girls, particularly in rural areas, were already yielding results, with nine out of ten girls aged 6 to 12 attending school.

17. A number of institutional mechanisms had been established, including a Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Family, with a view to facilitating women's integration into the country's economic and social fabric. The five-year plan for the advancement of women (1997-2001) fully reflected the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action. The key objectives of the national strategy for women were the reinforcement of the principle of equality and partnership between the sexes and the promotion of the role of women in all aspects of development. Tunisia saw the advancement of women not only as a necessary element of economic policy, but also as part of a coherent and comprehensive vision of human rights.

18. **Ms. Omer Bashir** (Sudan) said that the Constitution of the Sudan guaranteed the equality of men and women in terms of their civil and political, economic, social and statutory rights. There was no distinction between men and women in Sudanese law, which stipulated that any words used in the masculine form were interpreted as implicitly incorporating the feminine form. The Public Service Act enshrined the principle of equal pay for equal work, as well as stipulating that, in the public sector, recruitment and promotion should be determined solely on the basis of academic qualifications and suitability, without distinction as to gender. Women also enjoyed special rights, such as paid maternity leave and shorter working hours for nursing mothers.

19. Sudanese women had equal access to credit and enjoyed the same property and inheritance rights as men, ensuring that they were financially independent. They were entitled to initiate divorces and forced marriages were prohibited. Sudanese women enjoyed the right to education and now represented 60 per cent of those in higher education. They had equal access to health care. Women were active in public life, in the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, as well as in government institutions, the armed forces, trade unions and the private sector. Owing to Sudanese customs and traditions, the problem of violence against women was absent from society. Her Government was working in cooperation with the relevant United Nations bodies towards the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all its policies.

20. The conflict in the south of the country had had a grave impact upon the lives of Sudanese women. The arrival in the north of some three million displaced persons, 70 per cent of them women and children, had led to unemployment, health problems and family breakdown. Her Government was striving to solve those problems by providing shelter for those in need and returning some of the displaced persons to areas where stability had been re-established. Its efforts to end the conflict had led to the signing of a peace agreement with all but one of the warring factions in the south. Negotiations with that faction were expected to begin in the next few days.

21. The problems faced by women differed from one society to another, and it was therefore inappropriate to attempt to address them in the same manner. Her Government believed that the enjoyment by women and girls of their rights was possible only through the realization of the rights of every group in society. The implementation of the recommendations of the Beijing World Conference would be the first step towards the empowerment of women in all societies.

22. **Mrs. Gyawali** (Nepal) said that, while some progress had been made in the field of women's rights, women still did not enjoy equal opportunities to participate in politics and large-scale economic activities. There was, moreover, a wide disparity between the status of women in developed and developing countries, with the majority of women in the latter still mired in poverty, burdened by traditional household chores and denied access to education and health care.

23. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provided a blueprint for the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in policy-making and the equitable participation of women in political and economic decision-making. The United Nations system played a leading role in the empowerment of women and she welcomed its efforts.

24. Women were especially vulnerable to violence, both in the home and as a result of conflicts. Her Government urged the international community to ensure that women and children who were victims of violence, as well as refugees and displaced persons, received adequate support.

25. Her Government was currently drafting a five-year plan for the advancement of women during the period 1997-2002 incorporating the priorities of the Beijing Platform for Action and involving non-State actors, such as private sector entities and non-governmental organizations. A separate ministry had been established to deal exclusively with issues affecting women. Measures were currently being taken to tackle the low rate of literacy, particularly among women, which was a cause for special concern. Her Government firmly believed that the full participation of women was a prerequisite for sustainable economic and social development and called upon the international

community to make equality between men and women, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, a cornerstone of every development programme.

26. **Mr. Ka** (Senegal) said that the Fourth World Conference on Women had been a landmark event. The Platform for Action adopted at the Conference took account of priorities in Africa and its implementation would strengthen women's contribution to political decision-making and development. Accordingly, he welcomed the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/52/281), which attested to the efforts of Member States, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system to put into practice the recommendations of the Platform for Action. His delegation attached particular importance to the review by the Commission on the Status of Women in 1998 of the synthesized report on the implementation of the Platform for Action, prepared on the basis of national action plans, which would provide a clear picture of the specific problems confronting Member States, particularly with regard to capacity-building and mobilization of resources.

27. Women's needs were central to Senegal's development strategy. The ninth national development plan for the period 1996-2001 had been formulated in the light of the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action. There was, in addition, a national plan of action for women, its primary objectives being economic development and the eradication of poverty, education and health care, women's rights, and the establishment of institutional mechanisms for the promotion and financing of the plan. Senegal, like other developing countries, recognized the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into its development strategies, an approach which should be replicated at the international level.

28. Women had been especially hard hit by the high social costs of the structural adjustment programmes implemented by many African States over the past decade. The problems facing those countries had been aggravated by the decline in official development aid, the exorbitant cost of servicing their foreign debt, the lack of direct foreign investment and the drop in revenues from exports. Inevitably, those factors affected the implementation of the national plans and programmes drawn up in the light of the recent major United Nations conferences, including the Fourth World Conference on Women. There was an urgent need for multilateral reflection on how best to mobilize resources to ensure that the recommendations of the various conferences would be implemented.

29. The situation of women and girls living in countries and regions affected by war and natural disasters was of particular concern to his Government and deserved greater attention from the international community. There was a need to consider how society might better employ women's special skills, currently undervalued, in managing and resolving political and social crises, a question which might constitute a suitable subject of reflection for the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

30. **Ms. Bartosiewiczová** (Slovakia) noted that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action stated that the rights of women constituted an integral part of universal human rights and their violation was as inadmissible as the violation of human rights in general. In Slovakia, the equal status of women and men was guaranteed by the Constitution. Nevertheless, a number of problems existed.

31. Slovak women were highly educated; many were university-trained. They represented a substantial proportion of the work force, yet their talents were grossly underused. They were also inadequately represented in political and decision-making bodies. Slovak women considered themselves emancipated and demanded respect, but traditional views concerning the role of a woman were not easily overcome.

32. Her Government had created a committee for women's issues, comprising governmental and non-governmental representatives and experts. The committee was unique among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and many European countries looked to follow its example. The committee had recently elaborated a national action plan for women in Slovakia. It contained a detailed analysis of the status of women, identified the main obstacles to attaining gender equality and defined strategic objectives and specific steps that should be implemented over the following 10 years. It had been discussed and approved by the Government and was being submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women.

33. An outcome of cooperation between Slovakia and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was the creation of a gender centre in Bratislava. The centre would act as an information and advisory unit and provide a liaison between national and international activities. Its work might favourably influence gender mainstreaming and gender equality worldwide. Also in cooperation with UNDP, Slovakia had developed a media project to publicize women-related issues and thereby influence the attitude of Slovak society.

34. As a member of the Commission on the Status of Women, her delegation welcomed international activities aimed at exchanging experience related to the implementation of the Beijing Platform.

35. **Mr. Hettiarachchi** (Sri Lanka) said that Sri Lanka associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

36. Sri Lanka's commitment to non-discrimination against women had been reiterated when it had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1981. The Women's Charter of Sri Lanka, adopted in 1993, embodied relevant provisions of the Convention. A national committee on women had also been set up. The Ministry for Women's Affairs, established in 1992, was involved in the formulation of national policies for the advancement of women.

37. Sri Lanka attached great importance to the issue of violence against women migrant workers. International labour migration had become one of its major economic activities after the Middle East labour market had opened for Sri Lankans. Over 500,000 Sri Lankan migrant workers employed in many parts of the world and nearly 80 per cent of them were women, who were often subjected to various abuses and deprivation of rights. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted in 1993 and the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women were important initiatives which could address such difficulties.

38. He reaffirmed his delegation's support for General Assembly resolutions 50/168 and 51/65, which emphasized the obligations of both the sending and receiving States in the protection of the human rights of migrant workers, and the need for regular consultations between them on that subject. Sri Lanka had acceded to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families in 1996. The Convention served to highlight the contribution of migrant workers in many countries and would help them gain recognition of their rights. It was hoped that countries lacking a national standard would formulate legislation in harmony with the Convention.

39. With regard to implementation of the Platform for Action, Sri Lanka supported General Assembly resolution 51/69, and had taken specific measures to carry the process forward within the country despite many difficulties. It also supported the elaboration, currently under way, of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

40. **Mr. Houansou** (Benin) stressed that women were represented in a disproportionately high number in statistics concerning extreme poverty. The advancement of women would be unattainable unless that appalling situation was rectified. With that objective in mind, his country had established a commission to follow up the Beijing Conference. It had also created the Ministry for Health, Social Protection and Women's Affairs, headed by a woman.

41. While the situation of Beninese women was far from satisfactory, there were encouraging signs. Women were represented in both the public and private sectors, and received equal pay for equal work. The proportion of women in the Government was small, but efforts were being made to improve that situation.

42. Benin had decided to increase funds allocated for basic social services beyond the proportion called for in the 20:20 initiative. It urged all developing countries to adopt the 20:20 initiative and hoped that the developed countries would reach the goal of 0.7 per cent for official development assistance.

43. In his delegation's view, it was necessary to integrate a gender perspective in all programmes of the United Nations system and other international organizations in order to change attitudes on all levels.

44. Lastly, he stressed the importance of the Microcredit Summit held in Washington in February 1997, which had made a significant contribution to the improvement of the situation of women.

45. **Ms. Steiner** (Israel) said that for women to be fully empowered in society, they had to share political and economic control of the power centres. Yet many Israeli women were in "lower-paying" occupations, and women held very few Knesset seats. In order to change that situation, women were encouraged, through appropriate legislation and affirmative action, to serve on boards of directors or fill high government posts and to use those positions as springboards to top political positions. Since 1995, the representation of women on boards of directors had increased from 3 per cent to 26 per cent.

46. Legislation on women's issues was quite progressive, but efforts were still needed to enforce it. Her Government was working in various areas of legislation, raising public awareness of women's issues, implementing training programmes and providing tools and techniques to enhance women's economic empowerment. Entrepreneurship was a partial solution to problems of poverty and unemployment, and suited women who found it hard either to leave their home or to "break the glass ceiling" in their work place.

47. The rural sector and the Arab sector were basically traditional. However, both men and women realized that by opening micro-businesses, women could fulfil their potential in addition to adding to family income without disrupting the traditional family structure. Small businesses could help solve the problem of the high percentage of unemployed women as well as adding to the gross national product of the country.

48. Israel had developed a network of women's business clubs. The objectives included providing women with techniques, training, information, support groups and opportunities for joint ventures. Moreover, those clubs hoped to form a bridge to the Arab sector to create more understanding. The plan was to seek out Palestinian counterparts in order to create a network of women in micro-business and thereby strengthen the peace process in the Middle East.

49. A community strategy had also been developed for the empowerment of women in local politics, in which women's organizations had been invited to take part. It was aimed at supporting suitable female candidates from all political parties. Follow-up of the process would indicate which strategies were more effective in advancing women in the political arena. Furthermore, proposed legislation in Israel would mandate the creation of an authority for the advancement of the status of women, whose responsibilities would include the legislative and systematic protection of women's rights in all spheres, including education, employment, personal safety and political representation.

50. **Mr. Rabuka** (Fiji) said that his country was committed to the principles set forth in the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Fiji had formulated policies to involve women as equal partners in political, economic and social development; improve their access to employment opportunities; disseminate information on gender bias for policy formulation; strengthen the coordination of women's activities in national development efforts; and review existing legislation to protect the interests of women. The Department of Women had the primary responsibility for promoting and monitoring the implementation of those policies.

51. The participation of women in economic activities had increased significantly since Fiji had attained independence. Women represented some 30 per cent of the workforce. The Department of Women conducted a micro-enterprise development programme to support women's income-earning activities, promote savings, improve the participants' standard of living and prepare women for integration into the commercial sector. The National Council for Women had helped increase the political awareness of women at the local government level. Discussions had been held with the Australian Government to enable the Department of Women to play a more effective role in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

52. As a multi-religious and multi-cultural State, Fiji faced a challenging task in implementing policies to ensure gender equality. Since local resources were inadequate to deal with constraints resulting from religious and cultural norms, external help was needed. In the implementation of the Platform for Action, there was a need to recognize the economic and political realities faced by small developing countries like Fiji. The international community could help by creating an economic environment that would enable such States, which had been marginalized by globalization and trade liberalization, to participate in that effort.

53. Fiji found it difficult to gain access to loans because of the criteria set by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which did not really take account of the increasing poverty in Fiji, particularly among women. Those criteria should be reviewed; and other analytical tools, such as social indicators, should be used in appraising overall development. Small island developing States like Fiji did not have the institutional capacity or resources to carry out their commitments under the Beijing Platform for Action. Increased official development assistance was an effective way to assist them in building their institutional infrastructures. Otherwise, the lofty principles of the Platform for Action would remain unfulfilled.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.